



There was once a Pharisee whose soul was troubled. In Bible times a Pharisee was a Jewish man and a religious leader. Pharisees prided themselves as being 'law keepers'. Not only did they keep all the Old Testament laws, they would even make up more laws (really crazy ones) to show how righteous and good they were.

Did You Know ...?

The Pharisees were determined to 'Keep the Sabbath holy' by not working on that day. So they actually made a law saying how many steps you were allowed to walk before it was considered work!

Pharisees were proud of their position in society and often drew attention to themselves to show how 'holy' they were. Or at least, they thought they were, but they were wrong. When God gave the law to Moses in the Old Testament, He knew it would be impossible for people to obey it all of the time. Why? Because the law addresses issues of the heart, and the heart of every man, woman and child is sinful. Remember when Adam and Eve first sinned back in the garden of Eden? Well, that changed everything for every person born since. It meant that every child born from that point on was born a sinner. Do you think that is unfair? Because Adam and Eve made a terrible mistake, we are all born sinners! But it's not unfair. In fact it's the opposite. Sin deserves punishment yet God has provided a rescue plan for us. Keep reading.....

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Back to the troubled Pharisee. What was going on with him? Well the problem started when he heard some teachings which unsettled Him. Teachings about sin, repentance and salvation.





Sin is any actions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviours which are dishonouring to God. Repentance is when we agree with God, that we are sinful, and we turn away from our sin and ask His forgiveness. In fact, the word 'repent' actually means to 'change your mind'. You could picture repentance as turning 180 degrees from the direction you were heading. For example, if we were back-chatting parents or teachers, to repent (or change your mind) means to turn and go in the opposite direction, making sure our responses are respectful.

But the Pharisees didn't understand any of this. They thought that doing right things outwardly (like following a bunch of rules) was enough to get them to heaven. But it wasn't. So, this Pharisee, whose name was Nicodemus, was troubled because he didn't know how to respond to all of this strange teaching he had heard. However he did know one thing he could do. He waited until it was dark and then he left his house and went to the One who could help him. He went to Jesus. Why did Nicodemus visit Jesus at night under the cover of darkness? It was because the Pharisees were a prideful bunch. They believed they were the ones with the answers. Nicodemus didn't want anyone else to know his soul was troubled, but he knew that he needed to go to Jesus. He knew he needed to know the truth about eternal life. Nicodemus did exactly the right thing. God had sent Jesus, His beloved Son to bring the good news of forgiveness and salvation to all who would believe in Him.

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he





is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:1-8)

Jesus told Nicodemus what he needed to know, He told him that those who are born again will have eternal life. Notice that Jesus didn't say anything about following rules. Of course, the idea of being born again was very strange to Nicodemus. The only 'birth' he knew of was when a baby was born. He wondered how that could happen to someone who has already been born once before. However, Jesus wasn't meaning that you had to literally be born again. He was meaning that there needed to be new life. So, He answered Nicodemus again.

⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

When Jesus speaks of being born of water and Spirit, He means this: the water represents cleansing of sin. The Spirit of God is the one who gives new and transformed life into a person's cleansed (forgiven) heart.

Jesus was saying that the heart of a person is sinful and needs cleansing and transforming. It can't be done by good works or even by following a long list of rules. It can only be done by the work of God to cleanse us and forgive us our sins and transform us to be more like Him.

But why must this cleansing and transforming work be done? Can't God love us just as we are and accept us into heaven without us having to change? Well, God does love us as we are. Very much in fact. But God is a holy God. He is perfect and righteous and good, and He cannot be in the presence of sin. That means He cannot accept





us as we are, as sinners. It's not our personalities or our looks that need to change. We don't need to be funnier, or more creative, or cooler. No, God made us all unique and wonderful, right down to the freckles on our noses and our loud laughs! It's the sin in us that is the problem. That is what needs to be dealt with. But we can't deal with it. You might remember the Bible speaks of people making sacrifices of animals to pay for their sin.

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

The consequence (or the wages) of sin, is death. But when Jesus came, He died on our behalf to pay for the sin of all who would believe in Him. Isn't that amazing? Jesus put it this way when He was explaining to Nicodemus this very same thing.

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Remember, I said that the Pharisees didn't understand what salvation was? Salvation means 'being saved', and the Pharisees didn't see their need to be saved. They did not understand that they were sinners, just as you and I are, and that continuing to live a life in sin would mean that they would face death. The word 'death' does of course mean 'physical death', but in this case it means something much more significant. It means eternal separation from God. The sad thing about the Pharisees is that they had Jesus right there with them, telling them the truth about life and death and sin and forgiveness. However, they did not want to know. They wanted to keep their sin and their position of power over people. The sad thing today, is that many people are just like the Pharisees. People do not want to know that they are sinners because they love





their sin and do not want to give it up. They do not understand that the consequences of their unforgiven sin will mean not only physical death but eternal separation from God. Nicodemus, however, was different. He knew that he was in trouble. He knew that he needed to be saved from his sin, but he didn't know how. So, Jesus told him. Did Nicodemus believe Jesus? Perhaps not straight away but at some time Nicodemus repented of his sin and believed in Jesus as his Saviour. In fact, after Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus was one of the men who came forward to take Jesus' body and prepare it for burial in the tomb. Imagine that! The Pharisees wanted Jesus dead and they succeeded, but one of their own kind had experienced the life transforming forgiveness of Jesus, and served Jesus as best he could, by taking His body to prepare it for burial. What must the other Pharisees have thought? Nicodemus didn't care. He had been saved from his sin and born again into a new life with Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. Nicodemus loved Jesus because Jesus loved Nicodemus. How about you. Do you love Jesus?

But Wait there's More!

What other Principles can we Learn from Scripture?

What is the gospel? It is the good news that first tells us that we are all sinners and that our sin separates us from God, who is Holy and cannot be in the presence of sin. That might not seem like good news to you – but it doesn't end there. God, who loves the world so much, sent His Son Jesus to come to this earth and live, and to die a horrible death on the cross as the sacrifice and payment for sin on our behalf. To be saved we must turn from our sin, asking God's forgiveness, accept Jesus as our Saviour, trusting and believing in Him, God's Son

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who provides eternal life through His death and resurrection. Then, with His help, we follow Jesus all our days.

That is amazing to me. That God would love us so much that He would provide us with a rescue plan, to rescue us from the penalty of our sin and provide us a way, through His Son Jesus, to be forgiven and part of His forever family.

The gospel is the most beautiful gift in the whole world! Let me highlight just three things about the gospel I find so overwhelming.

- **GRACE**

Grace is a common name for girls and in fact my eldest daughter has Grace as her middle name. It means 'unmerited or undeserved favour'. Or more simply put, 'a gift we don't deserve'. That's what babies are to mums and dads – precious gifts that we don't deserve. But the Bible uses the word 'grace' in a more specific way. The Bible uses it to describe favour from God that we don't deserve.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The Gospel is one example of God's grace to us. God's rescue plan for sinners, even though none of us deserve it. Salvation is something that only God can give us, because Jesus' death on the cross paid for our sin. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. In fact, verse 10 reminds us that whatever good work a Christian does, it's only because God enables them to be good at it. Not only can we not

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save ourselves, we can't even boast about things we are good at because God gave us those abilities anyway. So, it really is only by God's grace that we can be saved, through faith in Jesus. Isn't that awesome? Even though we have sinned against God, God provided the way for us to return to Him. Wow. That's what grace is. God's gift to us, that we really don't deserve. I am so thankful for it! Are you?

- **MERCY**

Mercy is a word which describes showing compassion or kindness towards someone who doesn't deserve it. God, in the Gospel, has shown us the greatest mercy that anyone could ask for. Read this next account which is a picture of the mercy that God has shown us.

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt." (Matthew 18:23-27)

The master in the parable represents God. He called his servants to account, wanting back all that they owed him. Remember, we all owe God a debt because of our sin. It seemed that this one servant owed a debt that he could not pay back, but he cried out to his master for mercy. Of course, he would never be able to pay back that debt.

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One talent was worth about sixteen years of wages. The servant owed 10,000 talents. Have you worked that out? It's about 160,000 years of wages. Obviously, it was a far greater debt than what the servant would ever be able to repay. It seems hopeless doesn't it? But here is where it gets pretty neat. The master forgives the man his debt. Completely. The master didn't do what his servant asked, remember the servant wanted time to pay back the debt (uh – how was he planning on doing that?) Nope, the master shows great mercy and took on the debt himself and released the servant from it. You have probably guessed that the master in the parable represents God, and the servant represents us. We have such a huge debt with God because of our sin and we will never ever be able to pay for it. But God, who is rich in mercy, hears us when we cry out to Him for forgiveness, and He freely gives it. Our debt, just like the servant's debt, is wiped completely. Wow. I have to ask, have you cried out to God for His mercy, to forgive you from the debt of your sin?

- **ETERNAL LIFE**

When God first made man to live in the garden with Him, it was to be their forever home. But sadly, the man and woman, Adam and Eve, chose otherwise. They chose independence from God by choosing to sin, and so they had to leave God's Holy presence. Because of their sin the perfect environment changed to a cursed one. Remember, the Garden of Eden was God's garden. It was where He walked in the cool of the evening with Adam and Eve. There were animals of every kind all living in perfect harmony. There was food freely available to meet every need. It was breathtakingly beautiful. And there was no death - none, not even of the animals. Then came that first sin. Think

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about what that meant. What a beautiful life they could have lived! But they chose sin. Not only did Adam and Eve have to leave God's presence in the garden but they were separated from God. When God made man and woman, He made them to live forever. When sin entered the world, part of the curse of sin was that the body began to decay and fail, which ultimately leads to physical death. But the soul of a person lives on. That's the part that is 'you' – your personality, your thoughts and emotions. That part of a human will live forever. You can see the problem, can't you? If a person is separated from God because of their sin, what happens to their soul when they die?

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

To 'perish' means that those people who don't believe in God as their Saviour, will go to a place without God for all eternity. The Bible describes it as a place of destruction, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. You perhaps have heard that this place is called hell.

But those who do believe in the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, receive eternal life and will enter heaven with God, and with everyone else who has been saved from their sin. What wonderful reunions there will be for those who have passed away before us – and how lovely to think that all who are saved from their sin, through the death of Jesus on the cross, get to spend all eternity together, worshipping God together!

What did we Learn about the Gospel?



- God made man (men, women and children) to be in relationship with Him, but when man chose sin, that broke the relationship, because God is a Holy God who cannot be in the presence of sin.
- All men, women and children are born sinners and all need a saviour.
- God sent His only Son Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin.
- Forgiveness from sin is available to all who acknowledged their sin before God, understanding that there is nothing that they can do to earn forgiveness or God's favour, but instead receive His forgiveness as a gift of grace.
- When someone is saved from their sin, they are said to be 'born again' – they are dead to their old life of sin, and alive in their new life with Jesus as their Lord.
- God shows us grace – His undeserved favour towards us.
- God shows us mercy – complete kindness to free us from the debt of sin.
- God gives eternal life and one day a home with Him in heaven, and that is only available through repenting of sin and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

Study Questions



¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:16-20)

1. Look at the word 'world' in the above scriptures. Read the sentence again. Does it mean the world, as in the creation around us that we love to enjoy? Or does it mean the peoples of the world?
2. Is the gospel (the good news) of salvation available to everyone, or is it only for a certain group of people? (Use the above verses to answer)
3. Verse 16 tells us that there are two options for people. What are they?
4. Using the above scriptures, answer how people can avoid perishing but instead have eternal life.
5. Why did God send His Son Jesus into the world?
6. The word 'condemned' (v.18) means 'to receive a sentence of punishment'. What two qualities of God have you learnt about today that led Him to provide salvation from condemnation?

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7. According to verse 18, who is condemned?
8. People who are condemned love _____ rather than _____. Look at verse 20. What does this mean?
9. The scriptures we have read tell us that people love darkness because they can hide their sin. Jesus is the light and He exposes our sin. Has Jesus exposed the sin in your life to you, allowing you to see your need for salvation? What is your response to this?
10. A friend comes quietly to you one day and asks for an explanation of the gospel. Write what you would tell them.

Let's Pray Together

Dear God, Thank you for the gospel. Thank you that, even after Adam and Eve sinned against you in the garden of Eden, you provided a way of forgiveness to all who would repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Thank you for your grace – that undeserved gift which enables us to come to you through Jesus' death on the cross. Thank you that there is nothing that I can do to earn your favour or your forgiveness, but because you are great in mercy and love for us, you have provided forgiveness of sin to all who believe. Help me to understand clearly your gospel that I might receive it, and one day be in eternity with you. Amen



MY ACTION PLAN ...

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3.

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